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Senate Judiciary Committee approves Sporkin nomination

By Bill Gertz
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The Senate Judiciary Committee yesterday approved the controversial nomination of CIA general counsel Stanley Sporkin to a seat on the federal bench for the District of Columbia.

Mr. Sporkin's nomination had been held up for nearly 18 months by a committee investigation of Mr. Sporkin's alleged role in blocking a 1984 Justice Department leak investigation.

Mr. Sporkin, through a CIA spokesman, said he would not comment until the entire nomination process is completed.

The voice vote approval sends the nomination to the floor for a full Senate vote within the next few days.

Senate conservatives who feel Mr. Sporkin's qualifications deserve closer scrutiny may try to block the floor vote on procedural grounds or filibuster the nomination on the floor of the Senate, said a congressional aide, who requested anonymity.

In the last of six closed hearings on the Sporkin nomination, Alabama Republican Sen. Jeremiah Denton, who has led the committee investigation of Mr. Sporkin, provided further details of the leak investigation, according to congressional sources.

Congressional sources said Justice Department officials had opposed Mr. Sporkin because of his role in helping a senior CIA official avoid an espionage prosecution for leaking classified CIA data to a Middle East affairs publication.

Mr. Denton said after the committee's executive session that he voted in favor of the Sporkin nomination because some allegations were inconclusive.

"I don't know beyond a reasonable doubt," Mr. Denton told reporters. "At this point, I'm leaving the man untainted until [the allegations] are proved beyond a reasonable doubt."

But he also said some sworn testimony provided by government witnesses during the investigation was "contradictory" and may lead to a perjury investigation.

Committee Chairman Strom Thurmond, South Carolina Republican, said through a spokesman he also believes that case against Mr. Sporkin was inconclusive.

Regarding reports of contradictory statements made during the investigation, Mr. Thurmond has said, "In some cases, witnesses were not fully candid," Thurmond aide Mark Goodin said.

"There were some conflicting areas" in the Sporkin probe, Mr. Goodin said. "But on the whole, [Mr. Thurmond's] position was that there was nothing conclusive that would stand in his way of becoming a federal judge."